



THE BASIL LEAF

St. Basil The Great Orthodox Church

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Parish Happenings:

Great Lent has dominated, in a good way, the happenings of the parish and Church at large. The first week of Lent was busy with services each evening, including Sunday Feb. 25th. That night many of us traveled to Dormition OCA (Norfolk) to celebrate Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers. There, we were joined by clergy and the faithful from all the Hampton Roads Orthodox Churches. Many of our choir members participated in that beautiful service. Afterward we enjoyed a discussion on icons, and had a Lenten meal. (continued on p. 2)

It Means The Tomb Is Empty

Fr. James Purdie

If you've been in one profession long enough you probably encounter the same issues, challenges, or questions on a routine basis. The same is true for the priesthood. I often hear the same question repeated by many people, which is, "What does it mean for my daily life?" People want to know how our theology informs their day-to-day life.

As we approach Pascha I will likely hear, or you may ask yourself, "what does the resurrection mean for my daily life?" Well, it means a lot! Let's unpack it. (Continued on p. 3)

We needed an incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him that we might be cleansed. We rose again with Him because we were put to death with Him. We were glorified with Him because we rose again with Him. A few drops of Blood recreate the whole of creation!

- St. Gregory the Theologian, Easter Orations

The Hymn of St. Kassiane

(from the Antiochian Archdiocese website)

"At Bridegroom Orthros on Great and Holy Tuesday, the Church sings the following hymn by St. Kassiane:



O Lord, the woman who had fallen into many sins, perceiving Thy divinity, fulfilled the part of a myrrh-bearer; and with lamentations she brought sweet-smelling oil of myrrh to Thee before Thy burial. 'Woe is me,' she said, 'for night surrounds me, dark and moonless, and stings my lustful passion with the love of sin. Accept the fountain of my tears, O Thou who drawest down from the clouds the waters of the sea. Incline to the groanings of my heart, O Thou who in Thine ineffable self-emptying hast bowed down the heavens. I shall kiss Thy most pure feet and wipe them with the hairs of my heads, those feet whose sound Eve heard at dusk in Paradise and hid herself for fear. Who can search out the multitude of my sins and the abyss of Thy judgments, O Saviour of my soul? Despise me not, Thine handmaiden, for Thou hast mercy without measure.

St. Kassiane the Hymnographer was born between 805 and 810 in Constantinople into a wealthy family and grew to be exceptionally beautiful and intelligent. Three Byzantine chroniclers claim that she was a participant in the "bride show" (the means by which Byzantine princes/emperors sometimes chose a bride, giving a golden apple to his choice) organized for the young bachelor-emperor Theophilos. Smitten by Kassiane's beauty, the young emperor approached her and said: (continued on p.2)

The Hymn of St. Kassiane (continued from p.1)

"Through a woman came forth the baser things," referring to the sin and suffering coming as a result of Eve's transgression. Kassiane promptly responded by saying: "And through a woman came forth the better things," referring to the hope of salvation resulting from the Incarnation through the Most Holy Theotokos. His pride wounded by Kassiane's rebuttal, Theophilus haughtily passed her by and chose another to be his wife. We next hear of Kassiane in 843 when it is recorded that she founded a convent in Constantinople, becoming its first abbess and devoting her life to asceticism and the composing of liturgical poetry. The best known of her compositions is the Doxastikon on the Aposticha of the Bridegroom Orthros for Great and Holy Wednesday (which service is, in parish churches, chanted by anticipation on the previous evening). Tradition says that in his later years the Emperor Theophilus, still in love with Kassiane, wished to see her one last time before he died, so he rode to the monastery where she resided. Kassiane was alone in her cell, writing her now famous hymn, when she realized that the commotion she heard was because the imperial retinue had arrived. Being now devoted to God in her monastic life, Kassiane fled from her cell and hid, leaving the unfinished hymn on her writing desk. Theophilus was directed to her cell and entered it alone. Not finding Kassiane, he turned to leave when he noticed papers on the desk and read what was written upon them. When he was done reading, he sat and added one line to the hymn; then he left - never to see Kassiane again. The line attributed to the Emperor is "those feet whose sound Eve heard at dusk in Paradise and hid herself for fear." When the emperor and his party departed from the monastery, St Kassiane returned to her cell, discovered what Theophilus had written, and finished the hymn now popularly known as "The Hymn of the Sinful Woman."

Parish Happenings (continued from p.1)

Next year we will host the Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers, and our own John Gresham will be the featured speaker.

The rest of Lent consisted of Pre-Sanctified Liturgies on Wednesday evenings, and the Akathist on Friday nights. In addition, we have been talking about "The First 1,000 years of Christianity" before vespers on Saturdays.

The Hampton Roads Orthodox Christian Clergy Brotherhood meet three times to discuss the possibility of starting a [FOCUS](#) center on the peninsula and southside. For now, St. Basil's and John Gresham will be the point of contact for the peninsula. The initial hope is that with our sister Orthodox Churches we can begin an afterschool backpack feeding program for approximately 50 elementary children who need nutritious meals on the weekends. That program, once established, will act as a launching pad for other social ministries.

The Antiochian Women continue their good work. They are asking that Easter Lilly orders be turned in ASAP. The lilies will be used on Pascha to decorate the Church, and may be taken home afterward. Meron Lulseged will again host the children's Easter Egg Hunt after Agape Vespers (12pm) on Pascha. She is asking that parents help by providing 10 candy filled plastic eggs for each child you have participating, ages 2-11 (older kids will allowed to help facilitate). As a reminder, the Antiochian Women meet each third Sunday of the month. There next meeting is April 15th.

Dn. Christopher has been working through the life and book of Job this Lenten season. His adult education classes are great way to expand your understanding of the faith, and enjoy a little fellowship as well.

James Crawford and the Missions & Evangelism ministry has been putting together the Sacred Arts Festival (April 21-22). You may have seen the yard signs around town already. The festival will showcase the beauty of Orthodox music, icons, and worship. This is a great opportunity to get involved in parish life, invite outsiders, and learn more about your faith. Please see James to get involved. In the meantime, mark your calendars!

This Lent also witnessed the falling asleep in the Lord of Nadja Graziano on March 12th. Nadja was born Feb. 25, 1929 and was from Long Island, NY. She was a faithful member of St. Basil for many years. She consistently attended services and could be counted on as being one of first people to show up for Matins each Sunday. Just prior to Christmas she began experiencing illness, which left her largely house bound. Her tenacious spunk and love will be missed dearly. May her memory be eternal!



Evangelism Across Boundaries: A Welcoming Heart

John Gresham, Jr.

Fr. Moses Berry, the president of the Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black, has often been asked for advice about sharing the Orthodox faith with African-Americans. He frequently responds, “You evangelize to blacks the same way you would to whites or anyone else. You make them feel welcome in your parish.” In this divisive and charged atmosphere of differences in our nation, it is essential that the Church develops and cultivates a heart that welcomes all who come through our doors.

It is not unusual for people of all walks of life to feel that doors are constantly closing in their faces. This applies not only to issues of race, but also political ideals, economic status, educational level as well. Even when the things that separate us are minor, our differences can be elevated by social media and 24-hour “news” outlets on television, radio, the internet, and print. It is almost impossible for any of us to harbor strong opinions on any topic. In every part of the country, Christian denominations are made up of people who are alike in every way from the square footage of their homes to the sports teams they follow.

Being a part of an ethnic group gives us a feeling of belonging and a sense of pride. Greek festivals, Black History Month, July 4th all help to solidify our identity. Yet, as Orthodox Christians, we are called to see ourselves and each other as part of the kingdom of God and as images created in His image and likeness. Politics are not to restrict how much we love each other. The color of skin and the amount of “green” in our wallets must not determine who is not our brother and sister. Fashion styles, tattoos, taste in food and music are also to be rendered as insignificant in light of the One who loved the world so much that gave His Only begotten Son that we may have eternal life (John 3:16). The Church is uniquely blessed to be this welcoming force in a world of separations.

The God we worship is three distinctive persons who share the same nature. The Son is begotten and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Yet the source of their divinity doesn’t rule over them. Instead, they occupy His right hand, a position of equality and shared dominion. Our theology can be compared to a tripod. The three legs work in concert together. To deny the validity of one or two of them in favor of the other(s) is as much of a spiritual failure as removing a leg or two from a tripod. Monopods are useful. But, they do not stand on their own.

It is not hard for us to come to the Divine Liturgy with a love for God and those whom we are close to similar with. But, the challenge for us is to reach out to the visitors and the brothers and sisters whom we are different and distant from with His love. The purpose of this evangelism is not to have an affirmative action policy or form a bi-partisan coalition. Our goal as Christians is not simply to “go to heaven and live with Jesus forever.” We are to seek complete and total union with the One who is Three. He is complete in relationship lacking nothing. Likewise, as individual Christians and the Church as a whole, we must seek this bond with those whom worldly standards would say we are separate from. Not that such differences do not exist. But, we are called to transcend these things which divide people. Failure to extend our love for others based on our shared nature and example of the Trinity is to remove one or two legs from a tripod.

Which brings us back to the question asked of Fr. Moses. How do we evangelize to African-Americans and others who have been traditionally isolated from the Orthodox Church? The Brotherhood of St. Moses directly approaches the topics of the role of the African Saints in Orthodox life and has speakers who address racial issues in modern society. FOCUS North America does not intentionally seek evangelization of any particular race. But, poor people of all backgrounds have come to the Church because of the compassionate work of the organization. Any parish can develop a program and strategy to bring in people of diverse backgrounds.

Ultimately, to be welcoming to people of different backgrounds is to be willing to follow the voice of the Lord. Philip had no particular idea of when Ethiopians came to Jerusalem to worship, what scriptures they had questions about, or if an official would welcome a stranger for conversation. But he followed the Holy Spirit, ran (yes, evangelism does take effort) to the caravan, listened to where the man was spiritually, and the ranking official let this man whom he never met before hitch a ride and talk. We don’t know how or when we will come across a stranger who is beyond our comfort zone. As the Spirit calls us, we must be willing to go out and meet them, listen to where they are, and engage with them.

It Means The Tomb Is Empty (continued from p. 1)

First let’s look at the obvious: The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that death does not have the final say. Death has been destroyed. It means that sin has been overcome, that we are redeemed, and renewed to receive the Holy Spirit. It also means that we ourselves will be resurrected when Christ comes again.

If all that is true, and it is, then the resurrection gives courage and hope to our daily lives. So for example; you’re feeling insecure at work and don’t know if you should speak up, remember that the tomb of Christ is empty. Perhaps you are concerned for your children; that they might turn out well, remember the tomb is empty. Maybe you’re afraid of change, or suffering from a torn relationship, remember the tomb is empty. In these, and like cases, the fact that the tomb is empty informs us that regardless of what happens an ultimate fate awaits us: the resurrection.

The empty tomb, the resurrection, means that your mistakes can and will be overcome. Your children may not turn out as you hope, and no doubt that is painful, but their challenges, disabilities, or shortcomings will be met with the resurrection. Change is difficult, and there is no change without loss, and no loss without mourning, but at the end of the day the tomb is empty, and the tombs will be emptied. A broken heart will happen now and again, but the reality of the resurrection gives us heart.

Now understand, the resurrection of Christ is not about giving us psychological warm fuzzies. Instead, it is a historical reality that can serve as a frame of reference as we encounter life from day-to-day. Moreover, the resurrection is really not about us at all. It is about God, and Who He is. As we recall the resurrection from moment to moment we can then call to mind just Who our God is. He is the Existing one who offered Himself because of our sin, who descended into Hades, trampling down death by death, and gave life to the world, whose tomb is empty. Christ is risen!

Dates to Remember

Great Vespers, Saturdays 6:30 PM. Matins, Sundays, 9:25 AM.
Divine Liturgy, Sundays, 10:30 AM.

Sunday School & Adult Ed, Sundays following Liturgy.

Mar. 30 Canon of St. Lazarus, 6:30pm

31 Lazarus Saturday

Matins, 9:30am

Divine Liturgy, 10:30am

Holy Week & Pascha

April. 1 Palm Sunday

Sunday morning services as scheduled

Bridegroom Matins, 6:30pm

2 Holy Monday- Bridegroom Matins, 6:30pm

3 Holy Tuesday- Bridegroom Matins, 6:30pm

4 Holy Wednesday- Holy Unction, 6:30pm

5 Holy Thursday

Vespers for the Mystical Supper, 9:30am

Reading of the 12 Gospels, 6:30pm

6 Holy Friday

Royal Hours & Typica, 9:30am

Decorating of the Bier & Pot-luck, 11:30am

Vespers of the Un-nailing, 4pm

Lenten Pot-luck, 5:30pm

Lamentations, 6:30pm

7 Holy Saturday

Vespers for the Descent in Hades, 9:30am

Midnight Office, Rush Service, Pascha, 10:30pm

Sharing of Baskets immediately following

8 Great & Holy Pascha

Agape Vespers, 12pm

Easter Egg Hunt, 1pm

